Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time Peter Daino

Feb. 15 & 16, 2020 All Saints Parish

Reflection on Mission Trip to Congo

Jesus teaches in today’s Gospel -- Be reconciled, Forgive those who hurt you, then Offer your gift. This helped me to understand a way in which the experience of Papy was different and more difficult than that of Dale and me. An estimated 5 to 6 million people were killed in 30 yrs of civil war in Eastern Congo, many of whom had the same tribal identity as Papy. Yet, wherever we went, Papy met everyone with a forgiving heart. Papy communicated so much love, and the joy was evident in the people who felt that love! I know the Holy Spirit was in all this, or maybe Our Lady, or maybe there’s no difference, because many of us see in Mary the Feminine Face of God, not just a sweet feminine face, but THE POWERFUL MOTHER-FACE OF GOD!

Where we were in Eastern Congo was near Kibeho Rwanda the place where Our Lady had appeared as a Young African Mother to an intertribal youth group of Hutu and Tutsi. In the apparition Mary was crushing the head of a serpent with her bare foot. She told those young Africans to pray for the end of tribal strife, the end of war, the end of hunger and suffering; and to work, at building peace on earth. Papy and many of our Congolese members pray daily to Lady Kibeho.

Today we are reporting back to you what happened to us upstream in Eastern Congo. As you saw in Dale’s excellent power point, we were in two cities. For five days we were in Bukavu, a city of half a million people, visiting Kesho Kongo, Future Congo. At several nutrition centers we gave out biscuits, with a high protein paste made of cowpea leaf extract. The ask of Kesho Kongo is for $22,000 to assist women farmers to harvest and process significantly more cowpea plants. These funds will triple the number of children assisted, so annually 75,000 children will overcome malnutrition and stay healthy as they grow up.

Then for 8 days we were in Uvira, a city of 180,000 people, visiting Human Solidarity of Congo. Emmanuel Maneno, the local head of Human Solidarity brought us to several Women Training Centers where women are learning literacy and tailoring. The women also participate in a loan program to help them create small businesses. Thanks to literacy, job skills, and loans, hundreds of poor women are making their families food self-reliant preventing their children from falling into malnutrition. The ask of Human Solidarity is for $11,000.

The ask of Kesho Kongo for $22,000 and of Human Solidarity for $11,000 comes to $33,000. We know that the collection today, and possibly one in May when Dr. Nyakasane (director or Kesho Kongo) visits us, will probably not reach that much. But whatever we can raise will help these projects achieve their goals. And remember: Randy and Denise Wolken are going to match today’s collection dollar for dollar up to $5,000 dollars. So, please be generous in the second collection today. Your gift will do wonders for the nutrition of children, and the empowerment of mothers, in Eastern Congo.

That’s our mission experience. But, let me say, each and every one of you here in this church, by virtue of your baptism, is a missionary. So, from one to another, let me share this advice. Not my advice, but the advice of the founder of the Marianists. He would take the new missionaries out to the novitiate garden and stop at the statue of Mary, with her foot crushing the head of a serpent. And he spoke to the snake: “You evil, afflicting the world, You -- poverty, war, sickness, hunger, oppression; Listen You! Your time is up!”

Then turning to the new missionaries the old man would say: “You’ve asked me which is more important the head or the heart, thoughts or feelings, in measuring your progress toward God. I don’t know. But here is my advice. PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR FEET! Where your feet take you every day, my dear missionaries, will be a measure of your progress toward God.” Then tapping Mary’s snake crushing foot, he would say, “BE FIERCE AS A MOTHER! Look at this mother’s bare foot pressing down on the head of a poisonous snake, to save her children. You are now That Foot! BE THAT FOOT! BE FIERCE AS A MOTHER!”

Most of the people working for the success of the 2 projects we visited in Eastern Congo, are Mothers. During my years in Kenya, when I got afraid, women told me: “BE FIERCE AS A MOTHER.” Because, turns out, this saying is also part of an African Proverb.

And the women to whom you are giving today are fierce, fierce in the love they have for their children.

So, please, All Saints, today, BE FIERCE IN YOUR GIVING!